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ABSTRACT

This four-part study, which focused on the relationship between the incidence of Black English and the child's perception that Black English is not preferred speech, identified the phonological characteristics in the dialect speech of black second grade children of low socioeconomic background in New York City public schools. Specifically, the study (1) established language styles of black second graders by recording phonemic characteristics of their speech, (2) asked each child to judge the "rightness" of words pronounced in dialect and in standard English, (3) examined the relationship between the use of dialect speech and the ability to identify words written in traditional orthography, and (4) contrasted groups using dialect speech where different approaches of teaching were used. Results of the study showed that children preferred dialect speech and that dialect speech does not interfere with the child's ability to identify words in traditional orthography. Three appendixes contain copies of material used in the study. (JM)

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BLACK SECOND GRADERS' PERCEPTION OF THEIR DIALECT SPEECH AND THEIR ABILITY TO RECOGNIZE TRADITIONAL ORTHOGRAPHY

Symposium: Teaching Reading to Speakers of Black English

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INTRODUCTION

Language patterns of young Black school children have been an increasingly important focus of teachers, linguists and school administrators for the past few years. The relationship of language patterns of reading achievement is a significant aspect of this focus. Researchers have examined the relationship of various components of reading programs to language patterns of Black dialect speakers in search of answers to reading problems. The present study posits that knowledge of phonemes used by many Black second graders in New York City public schools, and knowledge of how the child perceives the language he uses in terms of "right" or "wrong" might be a missing link for teachers in planning an effective reading program for these children. It was the purpose of this study to find the relationship between the incidence of Black English and the child's perception that Black English is not preferred speech. The study examined the Black child's verbal quality of speech, his preference for dialect or standard speech when heard together, and his ability to identify visually the standard spelling of a word when that word is paired with its counterpart in dialect spelling. The study also looked at the relationship between dialect speech and the reading approach used to teach a group of children. This four part study first, established language styles of Black second graders through recording phonemic

characteristics of their speech; second, asked the youngster to judge "rightness" of words pronounced both in dialect and standard English; third, examined the relationship between use of dialect speech and the ability to identify words written in traditional orthography; and finally, contrasted groups using dialect speech where different approaches of teaching reading were used.

Black children's speech is of interest to some linguists, because of their interest in comparing development and use of dialect speech with development and use of standard English speech sounds. Labov (1967a), Baratz (1969), and Stewart (1969) have made studies of the relationship of Black children's speech and their success in reading. (4), (2), (7). These linguists have observed that speech used by the Black child outside of school is quite different from speech patterns the child is expected to master and use in school. Concurrent to this, dialects used outside of school are neither understood or accepted by teachers in the school setting. Both Labov (1967a) and Stewart (1969) discuss the effect of this on reading success in school. (5), (7).

Baratz (1969), Stewart (1971), and Leaverton (1968) all see the reading process as being delayed and hindered because of the difference in language styles between Black urban children and white standard English speaking children.

(2), (7), (6). Baratz (1969), and Stewart (1969) recommend first teaching the child to read in his mother tongue. (2), (7). In this case the mother tongue is Black English.

Leaverton and Gladney (1968), feel there should be a simultaneous approach which handles Black English and standard in the same text. (6). Leaverton and Gladney (1968) proposed and instituted such a program which was studied in Chicago. (6). The results indicated no statistically significant differences in use of verb forms between the experimental and control groups. However, there was a trend toward use of standard English verb form in the experimental group.

Linguists and educators have shown continued interest in finding the relationship between some Black children's language and their poor reading achievement. Low reading scores in predominantly Black school districts are of utmost importance, and yet, a puzzle to educators.

Each linguist has his own terminology for expressing language variations of Blacks. Labov (1967a) calls the speech of some Black urban children "Non-Standard English." (4). Dillard (1972) uses the term "Black English." (3). Bailey (1969) prefers to use the term "Black Dialect." while Stewart (1969) uses "Negro Non-Standard English." (1), (7). These terms are all synonomous and represent some divergence from the speech of white standard speaking children.

Operational Definitions

Dialect: According to Dillard (1972):

> Dialect, as used in linguistics, has none of the opprobrium attached to the term in such popular phrases as dialect comedy, etc. It is a collection of idialects; that is, the speech pattern of a number of individuals whose language is similar in some significant way (p. 300). (3).

Orthography: Correct or standard spelling.

Phonology: According to Dillard (1972):

> Pholology is the systematic study of sound patterns of language--either language in general terms of "Universal" phonology or by an individual language (p. 302). (3).

He indicates that the layman uses the term "pronuciation" for what linguists mean by phonology.

Standard English: According to Dillard (1972):

> A standard language (or dialect) is one which has achieved official recognition in terms of having written grammatical descriptions (especially if they prescribe "correct" usage), dictionaries and printed works with complete expositions (not just passages of dialogue) in the language (p. 303). (3).

METHOD AND PROCEDURE

This study dealt with the identification of phonological characteristics of dialect speech of Black second grade children, of low socio-economic background in New York City Public Schools. There were two hypotheses investigated in the study. First, there is a positive correlation between incidence of dialect speech of Black second graders and their perception that dialect speech is bad, and second, use of dialect speech does not interfere with the dialect speaker's ability to identify words in traditional orthography. A positive correlation was hypothesized based on the notion that dialect speaking children in school would already have received sufficient "correction" of their speech to perceive that their speech was "bad." Type of materials used for reading instruction were also examined as a variable. Data to test these hypotheses was gathered from the following tasks:

Part I (S) - Dialect speaking: This task measured the number of pronunciations in dialect of 18 words used in describing pictures from a picture folder.

Part II (P) - To examine the perception that dialect speech is "bad." Alternative pronuciations of 14 words were presented and

the number of standard English choices were scored.

Part III (W) - A task involving identification of words written in both traditional orthography and dialect was presented and the number of standard English choices from 13 pairs of presented words was scored.

RESULTS

The phonological characteristics found in the speech of the 60 subjects investigated in this study overwhelmingly support the findings in studies conducted by Labov (1967b), Baratz (1969), Bailey (1969), and Stewart (1969). (5), (2), (1). All the children tested for phonological variations showed evidence of some dialect speech. More than 50 percent of the subjects used dialect speech more than half the time, as evidenced through conversation about the pictures presented. These findings had been anticipated, due to the fact that the school was located in the heart of a dialect speaking community.

The first hypothesis, which stated there was a positive correlation between dialect speech and the child's perception that dialect speech is bad, was not substantiated. When the

children were presented with samples of standard English, and dialect speech and asked, "Which one you think, say it right?". the findings indicated a preference for dialect speech.

The second hypothesis, that dialect speech does not interfere with the child's ability to identify words in traditional orhography, was supported by the findings. Even though dialect speaking children perceived their dialect speech as "right." they were indeed able to identify words spelled in traditional orthography when these words were placed a longside of words spelled in dialect. This finding has significant implications for reading instruction. It strongly suggests that children who were beleived by some to be severely handicapped by their dialect speech, are not impeded by dialect in learning to read.

In addition to testing two hypotheses, the study considered the reading approach being used in a class, as two of the classes, I and III, were using a Basal reader approach, and the third class, Class II, used a linguistic approach to reading. An analysis of variance was used to determine if there were any significant differences between the three classes in incidence of dialect speech.

The measure used for dialcet speech was Part I; ANOVA yielded an F of 5.80, significant at $p < .05$. Thus the conclusion can be made that there was a significant

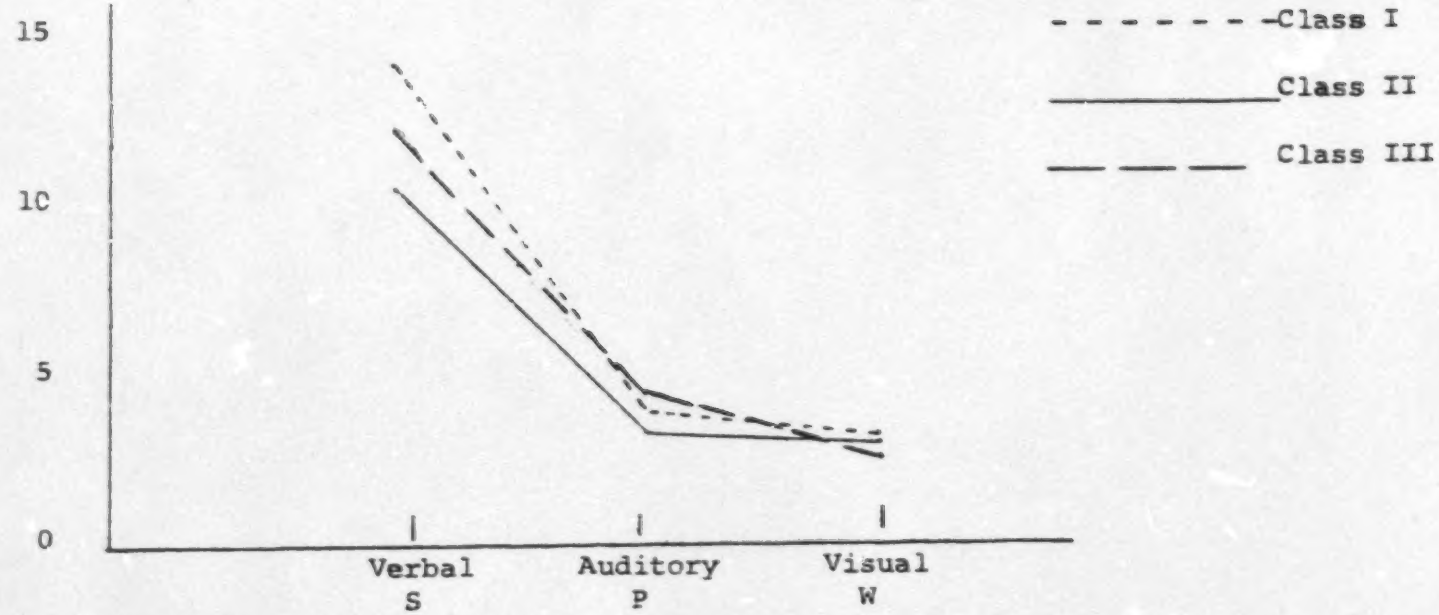
difference in the means of the three classes.

Figure 1 indicates the mean incidence of dialect speech of the three classes on the three parts of the test. One can readily see the high use of dialect speech in all three classes.

Black children will continue to use dialect speech for much of their lives. The extent of the teacher's movement from standard English to Black dialect in terms of understanding, appreciation and acceptance, and the ability to understand how the child perceives his language might be the key to establishing a successful relationship with the Black child. Much of this relationship, to be at all successful, will be based on mutual respect and feeling as good about the child as he feels about himself. This would seem to be a healthy, positive relationship to which to build a reading program. Many teachers are extremely sensitive to strengths of Black children and their language, leading to a positive teacher-child relationship. However, it really does not stop there, for in showing understanding and appreciation for the child and his dialect, one is really expressing the same for his culture and community.

Figure 10

Mean Dialect Speech on Part I, II, and III
for Individual Classes



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APPENDIX A

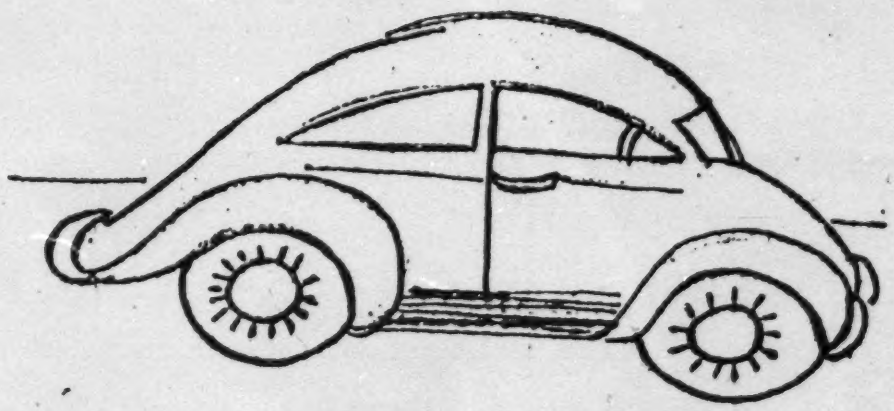
Recording Sheet

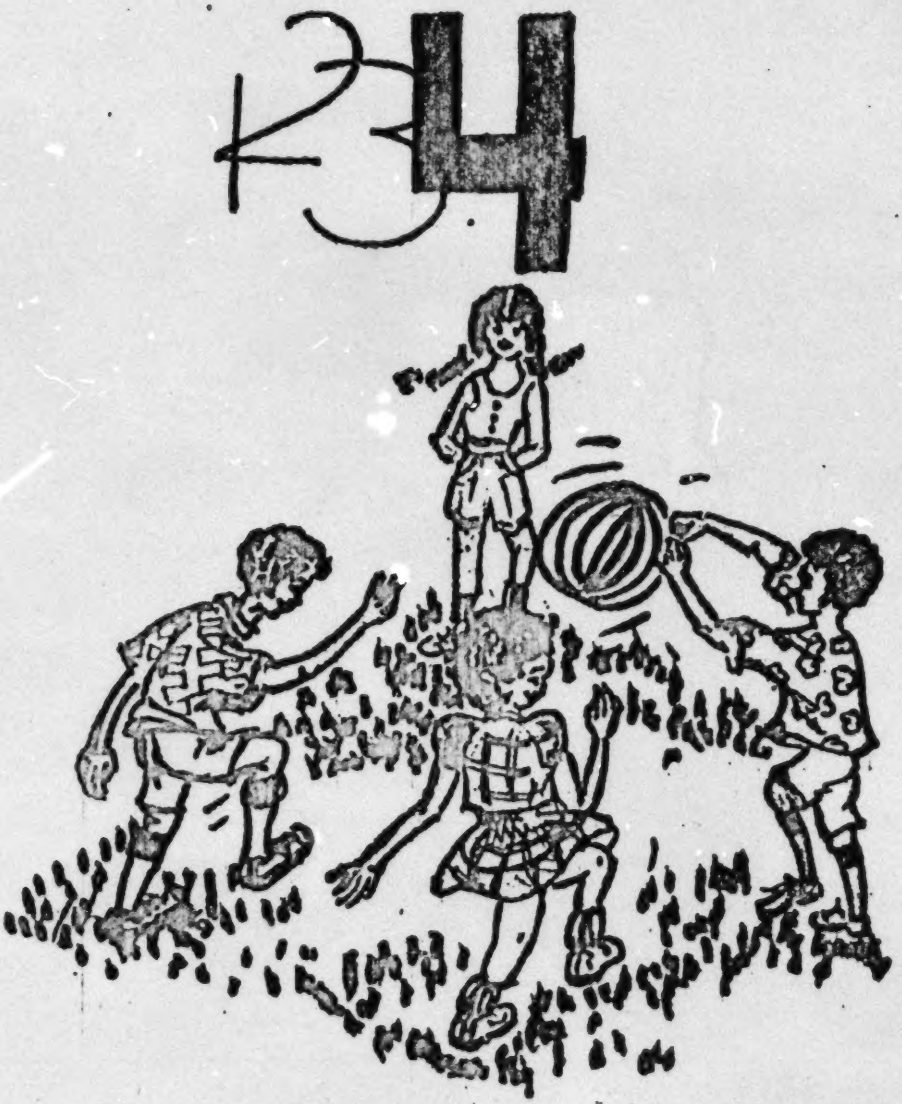
Instructions	Speech Characteristics						
PICTURE FOLDER	substitution of medial "th"	substitution of initial "th"	r-lessness	l-lessness	simplification of consonant clust's	substitution of final "th"	Use of "es" for plurals
Put a (✓) next to word when characteristic is present in child's speech	muvah	dat	caa	toos	playin	mouf	ghosses
	favah	dey	foh	chirren	scrubbin	teef	raskes
					cleanin	baff	
Add additional speech variations							
	Other phonological variables (switched)						
	peel	pail					
	pitcher	picture					
TAPED STORY	1. foh (M) four (G)	3. teesh (G) teef (M)	5. mouth (G) mouf (M)	7. baff (G) bath(M)	9. hepp(G) help (M)	11. pin (M) pen (G)	13. win (M) wind(G)
Put a circle around word as child makes judgment	2. tesses (G) tests (M)	4. muvah (G) mother (M)	6. desses (M) desks (G)	8. liff(M) lift(G)	10. dey (M) they (G)	12. picture(M) pitcher(G)	14. blowin (M) blowing(G)
PHONICS SHEET							
Put a check in proper box if child chose non-traditional orthography							

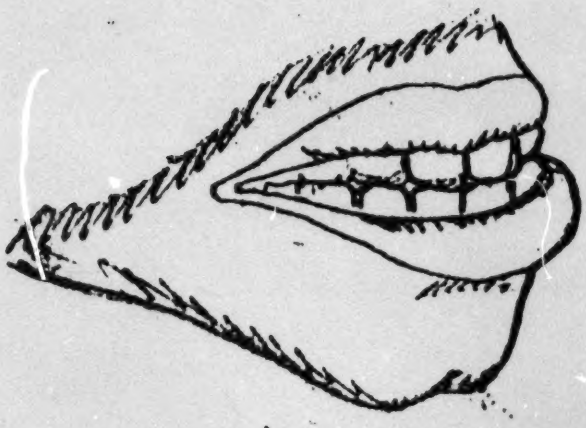
Name _____ Date _____ Grade _____ Age _____

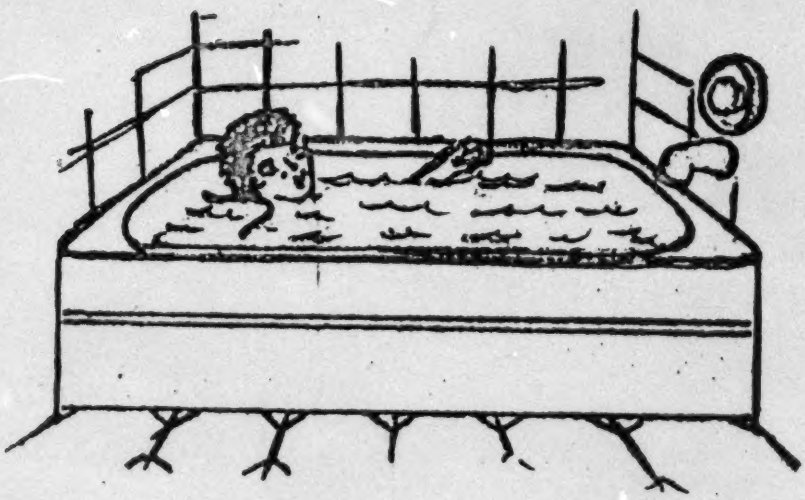
APPENDIX B

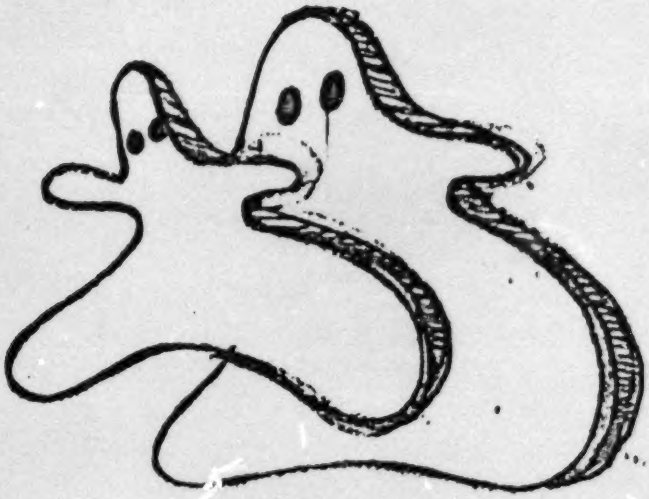
PICTURE FOLDER

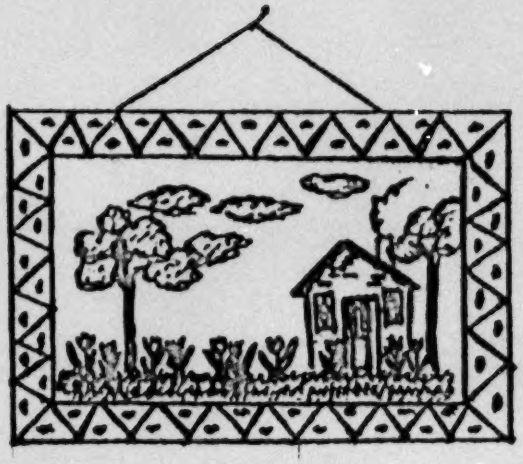






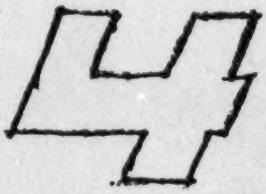
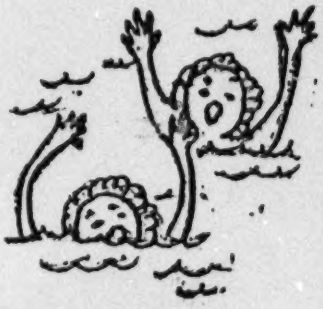
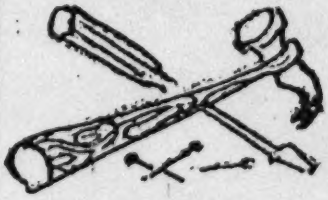


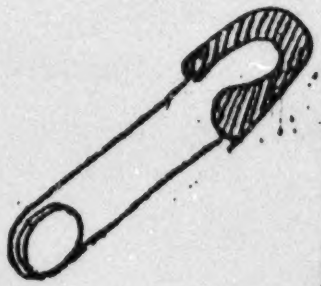
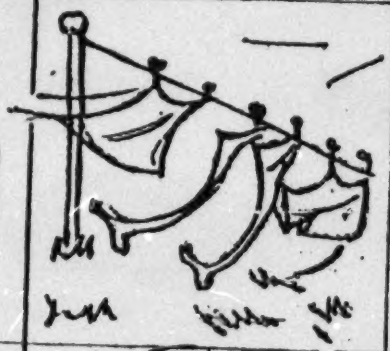




APPENDIX C

Word Recognition Task

four		foh
caa		car
help		hepp
tools		toos

pen		pin
blowin		blowing
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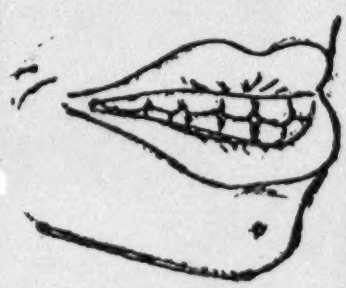
mouth teef		mouf teeth

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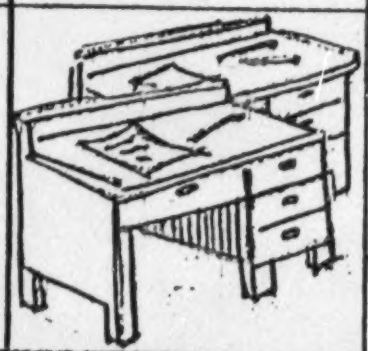
desses		desks
mother		muvah